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Endocrine Disruptors - Senate Hearing and New Administration

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Report Highlights:

In April 2017 the Commission of European Affairs of the French Senate organized a hearing on endocrine disruptors (EDs). The Commission said that France and the European Union (EU) should increase research to identify EDs and develop substitutes. In May 2017, Emmanuel Macron was elected President of France, and his position on the issue is similar to that of the previous administration although he noted during the campaign the importance of having clear information before instituting a ban on products without substitutes.

General Information:

On April 11, 2017, the Commission of European Affairs of the French Senate organized a hearing on endocrine disruptors (EDs). The objective was to present the conclusions of their report and to hear the point of view of the various stakeholders involved. The positions of the participants are summarized below.

The Senate's Commission stated that:

- France should **not adopt regulations that go beyond EU regulations**. EU and French safety agencies should coordinate better on pesticides, so that products allowed in the EU are allowed in France.
- It is difficult to prove scientifically that a substance is an ED because it is difficult to show that there is a link between a harmful effect and an endocrine mechanism. In some cases such as fetal exposure, effects occur years after the exposure. As a consequence, **probable EDs should be regulated as proven EDs**. However, regulators should not create a list of substances classified as *possible EDs*, because that would have detrimental effects on many economic activities.
- Policy makers lack independent scientific information on EDs. An **international group of scientists should be created** for this purpose.
- France and the EU should **increase research to identify EDs and develop substitutes**.

All stakeholders were in favor of making a regulatory decision quickly at EU level to be able to **ban proven EDs**. However, FNSEA (the main farm union in France) and the plant protection industry insisted on the importance of first ensuring that substitutes are available. During the hearing, an endocrinologist explained why, scientifically, it is very difficult to prove that a substance is an ED. As a result, all participants except the plant protection industry said they were in favor of applying the precautionary principle and **regulating probable EDs as proven EDs**. Stakeholders **disagreed on whether or not to release a list of possible EDs** (substances under examination that may be EDs). The industry noted that if such a list was released, there would be political pressure and these substances would be banned in spite of the lack of scientific evidence. Some stakeholders were in favor of a **risk-based approach** (the French Agency for Food Safety ANSES, the industry, farmers) whereas others supported **hazard-based regulations** (NGOs).

In May 2017, Emmanuel Macron was elected President of France. The **official position of France will evolve with the new administration**. Macron's official program includes the following statement: "We will set an agenda to phase out pesticides and develop alternatives. We will start with the pesticides that pose a risk to biodiversity or health. We will support the adoption of similar requirements at EU level." This position is somewhat in line with that of the previous administration. President Macron proposed a list of measures to "protect French people from EDs other than pesticides." The list includes "banning as soon as possible proven and probable EDs provided that less toxic substitutes are available." This position is more moderate than that of the previous administration, which did not take into account the availability of substitutes. The new Minister of Agriculture Jacques Mezard, a former Senator from Cantal and lawyer by training was named on May 17, 2017. He has not expressed any specific view on EDs or pesticides. France has parliamentary elections in June, these elections could impact the legislative agenda and priorities on EDs, and could potentially even change the compositions of the very recently named current Cabinet.

